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ABSTRACT

This study gathered data on high school student body presidents' perceptions of the principal's role and sought to determine if these perceptions were significantly affected by differences in geographic location, school size, sex, race, academic success, and parents' occupations among the responding students. Data were gathered through a Likert-type questionnaire that was mailed to 250 student body presidents representing all parts of the United States. The students were asked to indicate the importance they attached to 124 administrative functions. The least squares analysis of variance and Fisher's Least Significant Difference test were used to analyze the collected data. No significant differences in responses were found to be related to differences in race, geographic location, or size of school attended by respondents. However, female respondents had a higher response mean for all categories of administrative functions than did males, and students with the lowest grade averages perceived all administrative functions to be more significant than did more successful students. Differences in parents' occupations significantly affected students' perceptions of the relative importance of different administrative functions. (JG)

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The Functions of the High School Principal as Perceived by Student Body Presidents

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This is one publication from a series of papers on the principal's functions. Additional studies of the principalship are available by writing Dr. Alfred P. Wilson at Holton Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506

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THE FUNCTIONS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPLE AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENT BODY PRESIDENTS

by

Alfred P. Wilson and James Rezac

A considerable amount of research concerning the principal's role has been conducted in the last two decades. Most of this research has addressed itself to the perceptions of principals themselves and other professional educators. The present nation-wide study was an attempt to assess high school student body president's perceptions of the principal's role, in an attempt to contribute to this somewhat neglected area of research.

Purposes and Objectives

The specific objectives of the research were:

1. To determine if geographic location affects high school student body presidents' perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement.

2. To determine if school size affects high school student body presidents' perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership,

personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement.

3. To determine if the sex of high school student body presidents affects their perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement.

4. To determine if the race of high school student body presidents affects their perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement.

5. To determine if the academic success of high school student body presidents affects their perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility, and professional improvement.

6. To determine if the occupation of their parents affects the student body presidents' perceptions of the high school principal's role in curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, administrative responsibility, evaluation responsibility,

and professional improvement.

A Likert-type questionnaire was mailed to 250 randomly selected student body presidents, representing all parts of the United States. The students were able to indicate the importance they attached to 124 administrative functions. The least squares analysis of variance and the Fishers Least Significant Difference (LSD) test were the statistical procedures used to analyze the collected data.

To accomplish the objectives of the study, the investigator tested the following specific hypotheses:

1. No significant difference existed in students' perception of the principal's role according to geographic location within the United States.

2. No significant difference existed in the perception of the principal's role between students from small high schools, medium-sized high schools, or large high schools.

3. No significant difference existed in the way young men and young women perceive the principal.

4. No significant difference existed in student perception of the principal between the various ethnic groups: Black, Caucasian, Oriental, Spanish-American and others.

5. No significant difference existed in student perception of the principal between students of varying

academic success.

6. No significant difference existed in student perception of the principal's role according to occupational category of their parents.

Profile of a Student Body President

Because the sample was stratified by state when selection was made, we can construct a profile of an American high school student body president from the 163 useable returns. Our confidence in generalizing is further enhanced by the fact that our returns represent small, medium-sized, and large high schools in approximately equal proportions.

Most high school student body presidents are seniors. Eighty-six percent of the respondents indicated they were in grade twelve.

It is apparent, not surprisingly, that our typical student body president is a successful student with a high academic average. No respondent indicated a grade point average of less than 2.5 (4.0 = A). Only ten percent had less than a "B" average, and 50 percent had averages of 3.5 to 4.0. This would seem to indicate that high school students have a strong inclination to elect as their leaders students who are considerably above average as far as classroom success is concerned.

A breakdown of respondents by sex indicates that sixty-eight percent of the schools sampled see the role of student body president being filled by a male.

The vast majority of the respondents (86.5 percent) indicated their race as Caucasian. The next largest group was Black (8 percent), followed by Spanish-American (3.7 percent), Oriental (1.2 percent), and one respondent indicated he belonged to some other ethnic group.

The occupation of parents proved to be a relevant variable. Forty-one percent of the student leaders indicated a parent occupation that was in the professional managerial category, 42 percent were categorized as blue collar, nine percent were in the category of service occupations, and seven percent were from farm homes. Less than 25 percent of American workers are from homes in which the primary wage earner is in a professional-managerial occupation (The World Almanac, 1976). We might conclude, therefore, that there is a strong tendency for students from upper-middle class and upper class homes to run for and be elected to this leadership position in a frequency that is disproportionately large when compared to their actual number.

Hypothesis Number 1

The hypothesis that no significant differences existed according to geographic location and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and six geographic areas. An F ratio of 2.29 was necessary to be significant at the .05 level. None of the six F rations was this large, so this hypothesis was not rejected.

Hypothesis Number 2

The hypothesis is that no significant differences existed according to school size and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and the three groups of school size (Small: under 500; Medium: 500-1500; Large: Over 1500). An F ratio of 3.07 or larger was necessary to reject the hypotheses. None of the six F ratios approached the region of rejection, so the hypothesis was not rejected.

It seems likely that the actual role of a principal varies considerably from small high schools with limited pr programs and facilities to large high schools with their diverse programs and several assistant principals. It is interesting to note that in the face of this varied exposure to the principal's role, the students were not significantly inconsistent in their impressions of the role a principal ought to fill.

Hypothesis Number 3

The hypothesis that no significant differences existed according to the sex of the respondent and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and the categories of male and female. An F ratio of 3.92 was necessary for rejection, and this value was exceeded for three of the variables: curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, and evaluation responsibility. The hypothesis was rejected.

An analysis of the response means of the three

categories with a significant F, indicates that in the areas of curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, and evaluation responsibility, female student body presidents, in each case, assigned a significantly greater importance to these three categories than did their male counterparts.

Closer analysis reveals that the mean response of the females was higher then the males for all six categories, although for the categories of school-community relations, administrative responsibility, and professional improvement, the difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Hypothesis Number 4

The hypothesis that no significant differences existed according to the race of the respondent and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and the two categories for race: caucasian and non-caucasian. An F ratio of 3.92 or larger was necessary to reject the hypothesis. None of

the six F's was near the region of rejection.

Hypothesis Number 5

The hypothesis that no significant differences existed according to the academic success of the student and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and the three categories for academic success (G.P.A. = 2.5-2.99; 3.0-3.49; 3.5-4.0). An F ratio of 3.07 or larger was necessary to reject the hypothesis. This region of rejection was reached for three of the variables: personnel guidance, administrative responsibility, and evaluation responsibility. The hypothesis was rejected.

An analysis of the response means of the three categories with a significant F, indicates that in the areas of personnel guidance, administrative responsibility, and evaluation responsibility, students with the lowest grade point average (2.5 - 2.99) assigned a significantly greater importance to the administrative functions in these three categories than did students who were more successful in school as evidenced by their higher grade point averages. Students in this lowest of academic

achievement categories place the relative importance of principal functions at a higher level then the more successful students in all six categories, although the differences were not great enough to be statistically significant in the areas of curriculum and instructional leadership, school-community relations, and professional improvement.

Hypothesis Number 6

The hypothesis that no significant differences existed according to the occupational category of the parent and the six major categories of the high school principal's functions as perceived by student body presidents was tested by computing an analysis of variance for the six categories of functions and the four categories for parent occupation: professional-managerial, blue collar, service occupations, and agricultural. An F ratio of 2.68 or higher was required to reject the hypothesis. This region of rejection was reached for four out of the six categories: curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, school-community relations, and professional improvement. The hypothesis was rejected.

An analysis of the response means indicates that in all six categories of administrative functions the category of student with the highest mean was the agri-

cultural group, and the service occupation group had the lowest mean, with professional-managerial and blue collar somewhere between the two extremes. The two occupational categories are at opposite poles when compared by their dependency upon organizational structure. The farmer is almost entirely independent in terms of a job structure imposed from a supervisor. The service worker, on the other hand, is directly dependent upon another for the structure of the job and could almost be said to be subservient to others in the course of a day's work. It is interesting that these extremes apparently have an effect upon the manner in which student leaders reared in these environments view the importance of the administrative functions of an organizational leader.

When we analyze more closely the variable with a significant F, we find that in the area of curriculum and instructional leadership students in the agricultural, blue collar, and professional-managerial categories ranked the importance of this function significantly higher than students in the service occupation category. Although agricultural students rank this function higher than blue collar students, and blue collar students rank it higher than professional-managerial students, none of these differences is significant at the .05 level.

An analysis of the personnel guidance function shows an identical relationship. Agricultural students

developed the highest mean. They were followed by blue collar and professional-managerial in that order. These then, while not being significantly different from each other, were significantly higher than students from service worker homes.

The school-community relations function shows a somewhat similar pattern. We find that agricultural and professional-managerial students ranked this function significantly above students from service occupation homes. There was no significant difference between blue collar respondents and any of the other three categories at the .05 level.

In analyzing the professional improvement category, again we find agricultural students with the highest mean, but this time they are significantly higher than the other three categories. This seems to be a logical finding. Few occupations in America are more independent of others than the American farmer. A large degree of his success or failure is dependent upon his degree of self-determination and initiative. It is fitting then, that students from this environment see the need for self-initiative in a more important light than their fellow students from other occupational backgrounds.

Ranking of Principal Functions

Although not one of the specific hypotheses of the study, it seemed desirable to determine the over-all rank of importance of the administrative functions by examining the responses. Evaluation responsibility received the highest over-all response from the students. It was followed by personnel guidance, curriculum and instructional leadership, professional improvement, administrative responsibility and school-community relations, in that order. An analysis of variance was done and LSD technique was applied. The results indicated that the evaluation responsibility factor was significantly higher than the other five, and that personnnel guidance and curriculum and instructional leadership were significantly higher than professional improvement, administrative responsibility, and school-community relations.

Summary of Findings

No significant differences were apparent in the responses when based on the race of respondent, the geographic residence of the respondent, or the size of high school attended by the respondent.

An analysis of the responses when compared by

male-female indicates that females have a higher response mean for all six categories than do males. Females have responses in the areas of curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance, and evaluation responsibility that are significantly higher at the .05 level.

When comparing responses according to academic success, it was found that students with the lowest grade point average perceived all principal functions to be more important than the more academically successful students. These differences were significantly higher in the areas of personnel guidance, administrative responsibility, and evaluation responsibility.

The occupational category of parents provided the setting for some of the most notable response differentiation. Students from agricultural homes were computed as having the highest mean in all six categories, while students from service occupation homes had the lowest mean in all six categories. There were significant differences in only four of the six categories, however. In the area of curriculum and instructional leadership, students in the agricultural, blue collar, and professional-managerial categories ranked the importance of this function significantly higher than students in the service occupation category. In the personnel guidance area, students in the agricultural, blue collar, and professional-managerial categories ranked the importance

of this function significantly higher than students from service worker homes. In the area of school-community relations, students from agricultural and professional-managerial homes ranked the importance of this function significantly higher than students from service occupation homes. In the professional improvement category, students from agricultural homes perceive this function as significantly more important than students from the other three occupational categories.

Discussion

The theoretical framework to which this study addressed itself identified two distinct facets which determine human behavior within the setting of a social system. One facet being the personality and need dispositions of the individual, and the second facet being the institutional goals which are organized into roles and serve as norms of behavior for the role incumbents.

It was this second facet with which this study was concerned. A considerable amount of research has been done to identify the role expectations fellow professional educators have for high school principals. There has been a lack of research done to identify the expectations of a very important population, the high school students

themselves.

The purpose of this research was to provide a greater understanding to the practicing high school principal of the expectations students have concerning the importance of his various functions. It was hoped the data that was collected could assist the principal in making wiser choices as he establishes his priorities.

It is hoped that this study will indeed assist practicing principals. If it does, it will also have implications for central office personnel, boards of education, administrator-preparing institutions, and research personnel.

Perhaps one of the most interesting results of this study, was that it was possible to construct a profile of American high school student body presidents, since the study was based on a nation-wide sample of randomly selected student body presidents. It was found that the typical student body president was a senior with a rather high academic average of between B+ and A. This academically successful senior is a young man (In 68% of the cases), and is white (In 87% of the cases). Although his home respresents many occupational categories, a disproportionate number are from families headed by parents in professional and management occupations.

It should be important to mobile professionals, and particularly to administrator-training institutions

to learn that there is no significant differences (.05 level) in the perception by high school student body presidents of the principal's role based on geographic location. The responses of students from all six areas were remarkably similar.

In a similar vein, it was discovered there were no significant differences (at the .05 level) in student perceptions based on school size and race of respondent. It cannot be inferred that the principal's function is the same in a small high school as in a large one, nor is it justifiable to conclude that the principalship in an inner-city, multi-racial high school is equivalent to an all-white suburban high school. It is interesting, however, that students from each of these categories seem to have much the same expectations for high school principals in terms of the importance they assign to his job-related functions.

To the practicing principal it is worthwile to note that female high school students see all administrative functions in a more important light than do the males. Curriculum and instructional leadership, personnel guidance and evaluation responsibility were higher to a statistically significant degree.

The criterion of academic success of the responding student provided the information that students with the lowest grade point averages among respondents rank all areas of administrative functions higher than more success-

ful students. It should not be inferred that all low achievers share these perceptions. The students sampled were student leaders who had been elected to this position by their peers, and had been in office most of a year when sampled. It seems probable they had developed an appreciation for "administration" to a higher degree than many average or low-achieving students. Indeed, they had a higher appreciation for all administrative functions than even the more successful students, and were significantly higher in the areas of personnel guidance, administrative responsibility, and evaluation responsibility.

Even at the most rudimentary levels of teacher preparation, the value of understanding the home environment is emphasized. The findings of this study corroborate that philosophy. Students from different home environments do view the principal's function in a different light. Students from farming backgrounds view all principal functions as more important then their fellow students, and students with parents in service occupations tend to rank all functions as being less important.

An analysis of variance indicated there is a significant difference in the relative importance assigned to the six major functions of principal's functions by student body presidents.

The highest ranking category was evaluation responsibility which was significantly above the other

five. There was no significant difference between the category means of personnel guidance, which ranked second, and curriculum and instructional leadership, which ranked third. These were significantly above the means of professional improvement, administrative responsibility, and school-community relations which ranked in that order.

This study has provided some insights into the manner in which students view the principal's functions. It is hoped other researchers will continue to add depth and breadth to this area of understanding that should be vital to the discipline of building level administration.

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